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Corps announces recommendation in Lower Snake River report

Walla Walla, Wash. - The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has selected major systems improvements as the preferred alternative following several years of lower Snake River salmon studies, according to an announcement today.

The final feasibility report and environmental impact statement for the Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study says this alternative provides increased juvenile salmon and steelhead survival and maximizes operational flexibility.

The Corps' report has been forwarded to federal agencies for review. The final report is expected to be available to the region early in 2002.

"In the final report this preferred alternative is now known as the adaptive migration alternative. Adapting the dams with various operational changes and structures for improving fish passage better describes this alternative than simply calling it major system improvements," said Lonnie Mettler, Walla Walla District project manager for the Feasibility Study.

Operational changes include improving the coordination and implementation of spill, flow augmentation and juvenile fish transportation.

Structural changes include both near and long term improvements. In the short term the Corps is proposing: spillway improvements, upgraded adult fish passage systems, upgraded juvenile fish facilities and additional fish transportation barges. Proposed long-term improvements include turbine improvements, removable spillway weirs and surface bypass and collection structures.

The purpose of the feasibility study was to examine ways of improving salmon passage through the four lower Snake River dams and reservoirs: Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite.

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Four alternatives were identified and thoroughly explored within the study -- existing condition, maximum transport of juvenile salmon, major systems improvements (adaptive migration), and dam breaching.

The Walla Walla District is forwarding the report to federal agencies that participated in the Federal Caucus which developed the "All-H Basinwide Recovery Strategy for the Columbia River Basin." Members include the Corps, the National Marine Fisheries Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Park Service. As a member of the Caucus, the Corps is seeking final federal input prior to broader public release of the final environmental impact statement.

A draft feasibility report and environmental impact statement was released in December 1999 and focused on ways to modify the four lower Snake River dams to improve migration conditions for juvenile salmon and steelhead listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Public meetings for the Corps' Draft Feasibility Report/Environmental Impact Statement were held throughout the region in February and March 2000. More than 8,700 people attended the meetings. The Corps received more than 230,000 written comments.

The Final FR/EIS is scheduled for release to the public early next year. A record of decision is expected in 2002 following a public review period.

The Bonneville Power Administration, Bureau of Reclamation, and Environmental Protection Agency were cooperating agencies in developing the report. Other federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, provided essential input.

An updated web site presents an overview of some of the technical, economic, and environmental information developed for the study, which represents more than five years of work by the technical staff and engineers of Corps' Walla Walla District, and other Pacific Northwest scientists, economists, engineers and others. There was involvement throughout the process by regional states, tribes and other stakeholders. Questions and answers have been added to the site and include information developed for the final report.

For more information on the Corps' Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility Study visit <http://www.nwww.usace.army.mil/lsr>.